



Southland Beach

"Southland City" is a municipality of some 90,000 people in Southern California, and a part of the urban sprawl of Los Angeles. Its entire three-mile-long ocean frontage is a public beach, and has been since the city was founded before the turn of the century. Earlier in the century the beach was a famous resort; photographs from 1921, for example, show it completely packed with beachgoers wearing the bathing costume of that time and sitting under large umbrellas. It has remained popular and crowded ever since. The northern portion of Southland Beach is surrounded by one of the most expensive residential areas in Southern California. Adjoining the beach itself are private residences and beach clubs, which are still very fashionable and were once favored by many in the Hollywood movie colony when this area was known as "Rolls Royce Row." These large residences and clubs are separated by small parking lots, occasional refreshment stands, and public bathrooms. The yards of the large houses that adjoin the sandy beach often contain swimming pools, and they are set off from the public beach by fences of various kinds. There are only a handful of smaller, less expensive residences along this part of Southland Beach, which we shall call "North beach."

The southern half of the beach is bounded by small businesses and relatively inexpensive, sometimes run-down apartments. In contrast to North beach, "South beach" is flanked by a middle- to low-income community, parts of which some people refer to as a slum. Separating North beach from South beach is a municipal pier containing restaurants, amusement attractions (a merry-go-round, bumper cars, carnival games, and the like), and fishing facilities, including the right to fish from the pier without a license.¹ A six-lane highway parallels the beach along its northern portion, and smaller streets parallel the southern part. There are thirteen large city-run parking lots able to accommodate 5367 cars; the majority of these lots are along South beach or the area of North beach close to the pier. There are also numerous refreshment stands, 17 volleyball courts, and 11 large public bathrooms, one of which is mysteriously equipped with bidets.

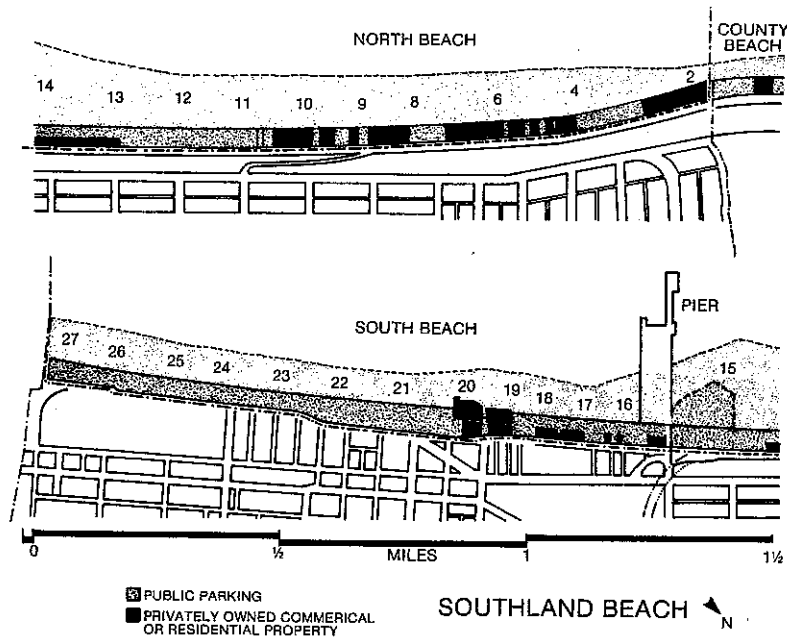
According to City and County records for the last decade, in an average year some 12 million people visit this beach, with a high of almost 16 million being recorded in 1970. Over 50 percent of them come during the heat of the summer, in July and August, and another 20 percent do so in June and September. On a hot summer day, as many as 400,000 people are estimated to have crowded into this strip of sand, and weekend crowds of 300,000 in the summer are fairly common. It is this crowded, daytime summer beach activity that we shall attempt to describe. In doing so we must first recognize that while there are some clearcut patterns of beach behavior to be seen, there is also variation. People and their behavior vary from one part of the beach to another, and from one time of day to another. To provide an introduction to this complex and changeable urban beach setting, it will be necessary to describe some typical beach behaviors as well as those variations that depend on time, place, and the kind of people involved.

Along Southland Beach

All of Southland Beach is clear white sand. There are no rocky areas, either on the sand or along the waterline. There

are lifeguard towers at 300-yard intervals all along the beachfront. Unlike many beaches in Southern California, however, Southland Beach is a remarkably variegated place, with many of its various locales regularly attracting distinctive crowds of people who engage in beach activities that differ somewhat from those seen in other areas. Beginning at the southern boundary of the beach, there is a large area (lifeguard towers 23-27) that attracts primarily younger "Anglo" beachgoers.* (See accompanying figure.) Despite the fact that this stretch of beach is paralleled by an unusually large parking lot, this area is said by lifeguards to attract a high percentage of local residents, including many young families who live only a few blocks away. This observation

*"Anglo" is a local term used by many persons to distinguish white, English-speaking Americans primarily from "Chicanos" (Americans of Mexican descent) who are also white and may speak perfect English. Unlike "Paddy," a term Chicanos sometimes substitute for Anglo, this term has few negative connotations in local usage.

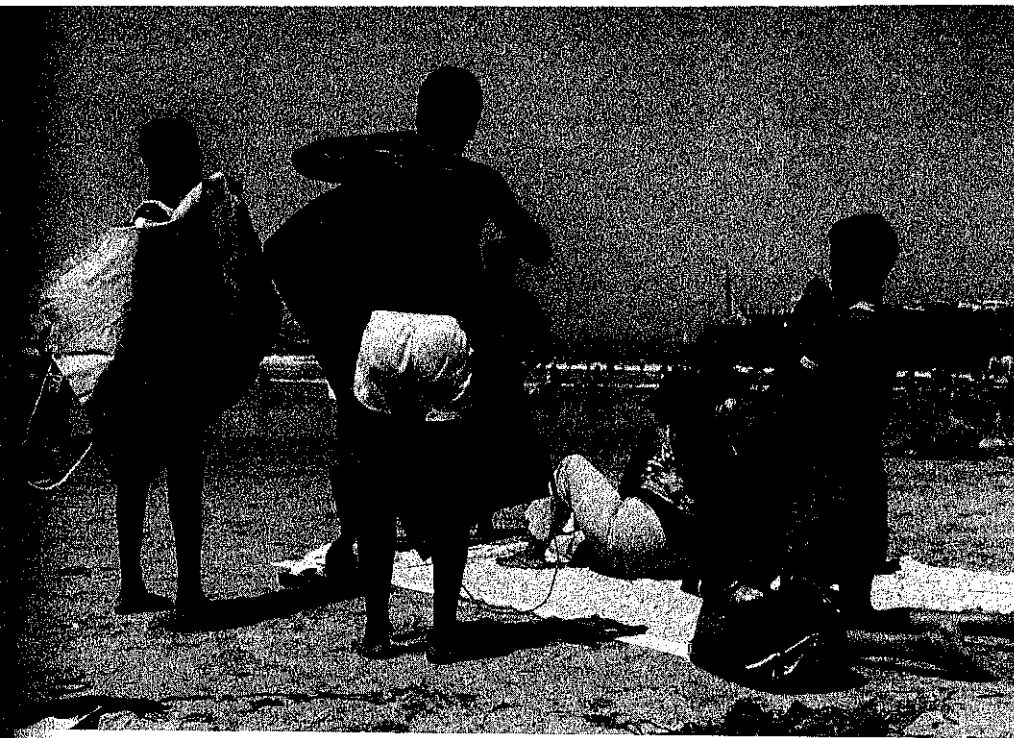


appears to be correct, since some beachgoers in this area nod or say hello to one another, a practice that is rare elsewhere on Southland Beach. Even on crowded days this large parking lot remains half empty. Just north of this is an area of comparable size (lifeguard towers 18-22) which attracts primarily high-school-age surfers and their companions. A few years ago this area was considered one of the best surfing spots in Southern California. Today this area is reserved (at least much of the time) for "surfing only" with no swimming permitted. In most areas just the opposite is true except for early morning, late afternoon, and winter days when there are few swimmers to get in the way of and be endangered by surfboards. Like the more southern area, this area is almost exclusively Anglo, although here they are not primarily local residents.

To the immediate north is a smaller area (between towers 17 and 18) which seems to attract young families and young couples from all ethnic groups and primarily from non-local areas. From the northern edge of this area to the south side of the pier (towers 16 and 17) is the most diverse yet distinctive area along the entire beach. This area was formerly a showcase for weightlifters and gymnasts and some of this atmosphere remains, with a fenced grassy area often used by gymnasts of all ages, and with formal gymnastic competition or exhibitions sometimes taking place on the sand. This area is also unique because of the presence of a large array of gymnastic equipment—rings, parallel bars, jungle gyms—set back on the sand away from the water. There is also a place with playground equipment and toys for children, the only area of this kind on the beach. The area around tower 16 attracts a highly diverse population, including a high percentage of Chicanos and many non-English-speaking tourists. Indeed, all ethnic groups and all ages are represented, with young and old, Anglo and non-Anglo being about equally present. Many are tourists; some speak no English. With the exception of surfers, everyone and everything that can be seen along the entire beachfront can be seen here in a relatively small, often crowded area just south of the pier.



Scene on North Beach.



Beachgoers near area 16.

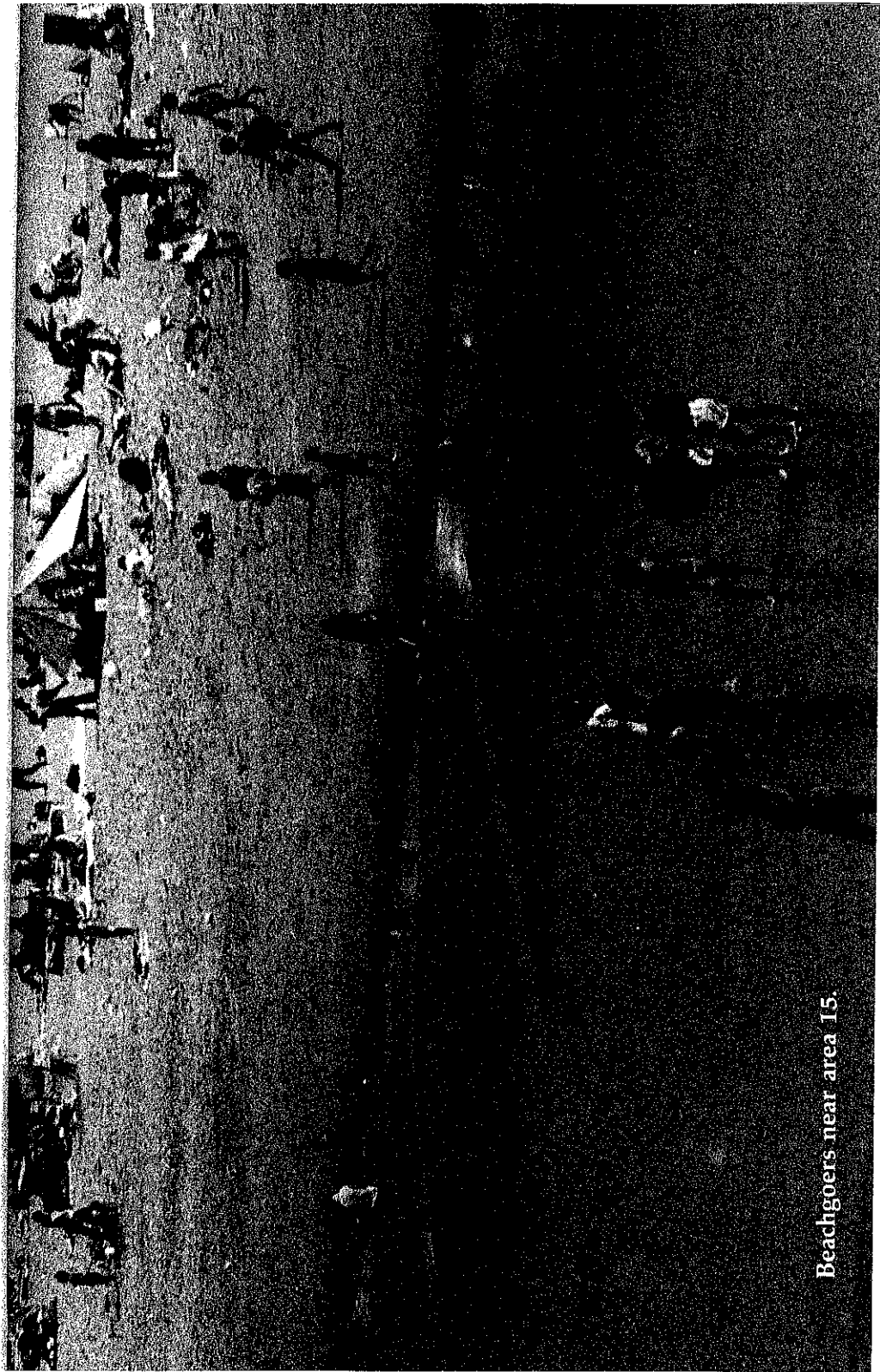
From just north of the pier to the south, the entire beach is paralleled by a paved walk and bikeway known as "the promenade."² From tower 18 to the south this promenade runs between the sandy beach itself and the parking areas. North of lifeguard tower 18 the walkway separates the sand from various structures, including a large and expensive apartment hotel, smaller and more rundown apartments, refreshment stands, and the like. In the area just south of the pier, there are some delapidated apartments,³ long tables where old men play chess, the sandy patch equipped with children's toys, the grassy gymnastic area, several volleyball courts, half a dozen refreshment stands which sell beer among other things, a "head" shop, a shop that sells beach gear, and a large modern structure that is the lifeguards' headquarters.

The promenade is often crowded along its entire length, but at the area just south of the pier it becomes a true "promenade" with hundreds of persons, many of them dressed in

street clothes, strolling back and forth, sometimes stopping to watch a volleyball game, to eat, or to rest. Some ride bicycles, weaving in and out of the strollers. Many of these strollers live or work in the area, but others come from far away, including tourists from foreign countries. The area is undeniably picturesque, and it attracts an extraordinary mixture of people, including teenage groups from the inner city, "jet-setters" from Beverly Hills, and local transients whose appearance is frequently both disheveled and bizarre. Some play musical instruments and one man sings operatic arias, usually without favorable comment from onlookers. While many of these people never venture onto the sand, this part of the sandy beach attracts the most diverse population seen anywhere along Southland Beach. The pier itself attracts many of these same people, who go there to eat, to play at carnival games of chance, or merely to stroll. Like the promenade, the pier, with its carnival atmosphere, attracts many people who never set foot on the sandy beach itself.

Passing under the pier to the north, there is another distinctive area, but one that is somewhat less crowded and diverse. This area, from the pier north to lifeguard tower 15, is unique because it is sheltered by a breakwater, providing a calm lagoon-like sea with only very small surf. This area is separated by buoys; one-half of it is reserved for swimmers and the other half for beginning surfers, and many inexperienced young surfers from all over Los Angeles come here. At the same time, presumably because of the supposedly safe water and ample parking, this area attracts large numbers of Chicano families from the inner city, none of whom surf, but instead wade and swim in the deceptively languid water. In fact, unpredictable currents can make this area treacherous for swimmers, and it gives lifeguards many headaches.

The next area to the north, due to the absence of nearby parking lots, is usually devoid of people, even on warm sunny weekends. It is known by lifeguards as "the desert." Another 300 yards to the north, however, there is a large parking lot, just at the place where the freeway exits onto the beach. This area around lifeguard tower 12 is heavily



Beachgoers near area 15.

crowded by people from the center of Los Angeles, the majority of whom are blacks or Chicanos. This lifeguard tower is painted with Chicano "placas"—in this case, baroquely lettered names of East Los Angeles street gangs. While local "beach people" never choose this part of the beach, many Anglos from inland areas of Los Angeles do come here, producing a highly heterogeneous population.

Two or three hundred yards to the north, however, is an area that attracts primarily families of all ethnic groups, with Anglos in the majority; and 300 yards north of this family beach is another distinctive area (towers 8 and 9) that attracts primarily young Anglos, most of whom swim or surf. The area around one of these lifeguard towers attracts people primarily from the local area, while the other attracts people principally from the San Fernando Valley. "Valleys go home" is painted on the first of these lifeguard towers, a reminder that relations between young beachgoers in this area are not always good. North of this is a large area (towers 2, 4, 6), stretching to the northern limits of Southland Beach, that attracts primarily family groups. Many of these people are from the San Fernando Valley, although one small area is almost exclusively used by people from Beverly Hills. No part of Southland Beach, north or south, is segregated de facto by age or ethnicity. It is possible to see an elderly couple in the "surfers only" South beach area, and blacks, Chicanos, and Asians sometimes settle down anywhere on the beach. But certain parts of the beach do consistently attract certain kinds of people.

There is nothing on the beach to mark the place where Southland City ends and the jurisdiction of another city begins, and few if any beachgoers are aware that a change has taken place. The sand is the same and so are the lifeguard towers. The change is noticeable only by watching the Southland City police patrol unit turn and go back as it reaches the northern or southern boundary of Southland City. Even though this study will be focused primarily on the beach within the limits of Southland City, the beach just north of its invisible city line should not be ignored. This is so because it

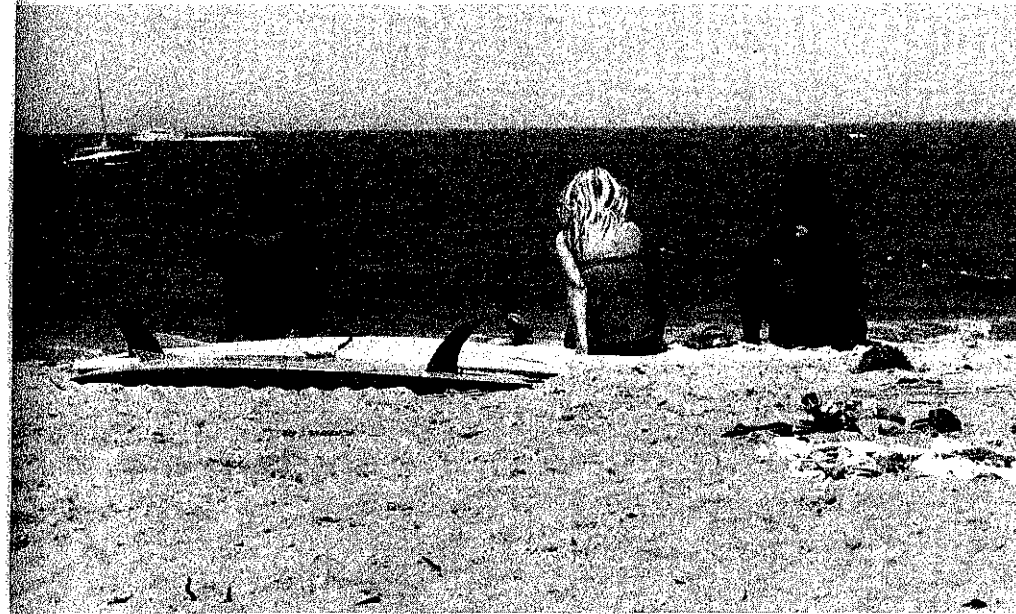
contains unusual kinds of beachgoers, some of whom venture south along the sand into Southland Beach, and also because these different kinds of beachgoers provide an instructive contrast with the people on Southland Beach.

This northern beach, which we shall call "County Beach," is one of the best known stretches of sand in Southern California. It attracts preeminently local and regular beachgoers—"beach people"—and has done so for at least thirty years. These beach people are typically upper-middle class Anglos, and while some merely sun themselves or swim or talk, as most people on the beach do, here people tend to know each other and form groups that regularly meet on the beach during the summer. Some of these groups persist for many years. In addition to the couples, individuals, and mothers with children who are common along the entire beach, this area is known for its surfers, who are old as well as young, and its volleyball players, which include professional and collegiate performers, as well as juniors and elders of lesser skills. In part because of its volleyball stars and in part because of its reputation as an "in" place, County Beach also attracts various show business personages, many of them lovely young women who wear the smallest but most expensive bikinis available. In addition to these kinds of beachgoers, County Beach has long been known for its "gay" beach area. For many years gay men have assembled here in an area one hundred yards or so north of the Southland Beach line. On a warm and sunny weekend or holiday as many as 1000 gay men crowd together on a small patch of sand. Conditions sometimes become so crowded that some of these men move north, where they may conflict with surfers, or south into Southland Beach. In County Beach "the gays" maintain a clear separation from non-gays. In other areas, no such separation exists. The presence of gay men on County Beach does not go unnoticed, as there are graffiti on nearby walls saying such things as "fags go home," and one may encounter a homemade sign stuck in the sand reading: "Fag Beach, One Way" with an arrow pointing away from Southland Beach.

Typical Behavior on Southland Beach

In summer, it is light by 6 A.M., with the sun making pastel colors on the sand and water. Later in the morning the seasonal overcast will usually block the sun, which does not shine through again until midday. On some summer days, especially in June, the sun never burns through the overcast. At 6 A.M. large vehicles are sifting, raking, and clearing the sand, a job they began in the dead of night. Partly because of these formidable trucks, one of which once decapitated someone sleeping on the beach at night, it is now illegal to sleep on the beach between midnight and 5 A.M. At this early hour there are other men on the beach, 15 in all, who rake up trash that the trucks miss. There are also a few men, mostly 50 or 60 years of age, who move slowly up and down the sand in the wake of the cleaning trucks using portable metal detectors in search of lost coins or other metal valuables. They keep their distance from one another and rarely lift their heads from the sand where their earphones tell them of a likely find. There is also an occasional yellow lifeguard vehicle preparing for the day, as well as a white police patrol car that periodically cruises the waterline.

Most of the people on the beach in the early morning are joggers, surfers, or fishermen. The joggers, most of whom are men, run on the wet sand near the water, their various costumes ranging from brightly colored (and expensive) running suits to ragged bathing trunks and T-shirts. Most are intent upon their exercise. They rarely speak, although one may nod or say hello to another as they pass. Women joggers run with particular single-mindedness. Because they see men at the beach at this early hour as being potentially dangerous, they say that they maintain a business-like manner in the hope of evading unwanted male attention. Even so, an occasional male jogger will run alongside a woman making comments that reveal his interest in seduction. One runs with a parrot on his shoulder, apparently as a conversation piece. As the women joggers go by, various fishermen who line the shore sometimes shout obscenities, and once in a while a



Surfers and girlfriend.

fisherman may enthusiastically expose himself. Most fishermen merely fish, however, while their families, who sometimes accompany them, sit forlornly in the cool damp morning, drinking coffee or reading.

At earliest light, surfers in their black wet suits are perched atop their boards in the glassy, pewter-colored water. More arrive during the breakfast hours, attempting to get in a few good rides before school or work; others try to surf until the crowds arrive and surfing becomes prohibited, as it is in midday between May 1 and September 30.⁴ In these early hours of the day, there is also an occasional individual doing calisthenics, or practicing kung fu or karate. There may also be a shell gatherer or two, although this beach is not noted for tide pools or shells. Now and then a fully dressed man walks along with a camera, and other people in street clothes sit or stroll—whether they are early risers or late retirees one cannot easily tell. There are also some ragged, disheveled men

who are apparently trying to shake off a long drunk and may have slept on the beach overnight despite the law. Religious devotees may also appear at dawn. For example, groups of nuns occasionally walk the sand, and persons in secular dress may sometimes be seen kneeling together in prayer, or sitting with hands upraised to the sky.

This scene changes as the joggers and surfers leave for breakfast and work, while others like them continue to arrive. By 8 or 10 A.M., depending on the day of the week and weather, the influx of daytime beachgoers begins. Although a few lifeguard towers open as early as 7, before 8 it is rare to see more than 100 or so people on the beach. By 10 on a cool weekday, 500 or 1000 people may have arrived; on a warm Saturday, Sunday, or holiday, many thousands may be on the beach by this hour.

Mid-Day

While it is true that there are more young people than old people at this beach, and more white people than non-whites, there are many older people, just as there are many blacks, Chicanos, and Asians. There are also more women than men. In most areas of Southland Beach, about 60 percent of the teenaged or adult beachgoers will be female. Anywhere from 10 to 30 percent of all the people who come to the beach with someone will be women without male escorts. Perhaps 5 percent of all beachgoers are lone women. Young men without women also come to the beach in large numbers. In some areas of the beach fully half the beachgoers are over 30 years of age, and in several areas (particularly towers 12, 15, and 16) it is common for 30 to 40 percent of the beachgoers to be Chicano or black, and sometimes the percentage is larger than this.

Although there are some areas of the beach, as we have seen, that attract large numbers of local Southland City residents, along most of the beachfront local residents are a distinct minority. Various County and City surveys in recent years have estimated that approximately 85 percent of all beachgoers live many miles inland, with growing numbers of

these coming from black or Chicano neighborhoods in the so-called "inner city."

Our own surveys confirm this pattern, showing that about 90 percent of all beachgoers are non-local residents. In one survey, 35 people of all ethnic groups were interviewed willy-nilly all along the beach; only 4 of these were from Southland City, with this number being matched by tourists from other states or countries; the remainder were from areas that are an average of 19 miles distant. In another survey, this time of 66 women of all ages, only 6 were from Southland City, four were tourists, and the remaining 58 traveled an average of 20 miles to the beach, one way. These figures might vary somewhat if larger samples were taken on some probability basis, but there can be little doubt that most people who come to this beach, including those who visit it several times a week, do so from considerable distances. There are two important consequences of this fact. First, people from all over Los Angeles County congregate at this beach; second, in order to do so, most of these people have traveled far, and have paid to park. We can suppose that they enjoy this beach greatly, or they would not go to so much effort to visit it.

Most beachgoers park in large city lots that charge \$1.00 a day (\$1.25 on weekends), although a few park in nearby metered spaces that charge 50¢ for five hours. Some park on unmetered streets as much as a mile away and walk to the beach. A few arrive by bus or live nearby and walk to the beach. Some beachgoers bring with them towels and blankets, food and drink (often including beer), radios, large styrofoam coolers, backrests, umbrellas, cameras, books and magazines, swim fins and rubber rafts, playing cards, backgammon sets, shovels, frisbees and balls of all sorts, as well as surfboards, dogs, barbeques, and many other things. Families who drive to the beach from the inner city usually make a day of it, and bring with them a great variety of beach gear. Local beachgoers, on the other hand, bring the absolute minimum: a large beachtowel, some suntan lotion, and perhaps a book, radio, or backrest.

clothed on the beach. Even younger persons often do not wear bathing suits. Fully dressed or not, Chicanos frequently plunge into the water where they frolic or swim. They also engage in rough horseplay along the water's edge. The women typically sit and talk, usually in Spanish; many of these beachgoers speak little English. Blacks also come to the beach in large family groups, but they usually wear bathing suits. Unlike Chicanos, many blacks also come to the beach in couples or alone, and when they arrive they often act like any Anglo beachgoer, including tanning themselves in the sun.

All along the beach, then, people seem to find pleasure in what they do. They sun themselves, sleep, read, listen to radios, and play cards. Many swim, body surf, or wade; others stroll or run along the waterline. Many men glance at women; a few women glance back. Some men approach women; some women welcome their approach. Younger men play football, sometimes organizing games and playing tackle; men and women alike play catch with frisbees. Other men play soccer in the shallow water, or do exercises. A woman may look for a child she has temporarily lost sight of. Men and women play spirited games of volleyball, then shower off the sand, and swim. People stop to eat, opening their picnic lunches or buying pizza, corndogs, beer, or lemonade at a nearby refreshment stand. Many drink beer on the sand; some smoke marijuana. Here and there someone feeds seagulls, or takes photographs, or digs for sand crabs. Children dash happily to and fro. The sun is warm, the breezes are cool. The water is appealing. The sound of the surf is relaxing. There is a sensuous aura, too, created by so many beautiful near-naked bodies and the sense of escape from the problems of everyday life.

All of these enjoyable activities and sensations are a part of every summer day for large numbers of beachgoers, yet it would be wrong to give the impression that these people mingle with one another. With rare exceptions, people at the beach restrict their interaction to the person or persons with whom they came. They have only infrequent and fleeting encounters with "strangers." People may nod to one another, especially if they are walking along the waterline, they may

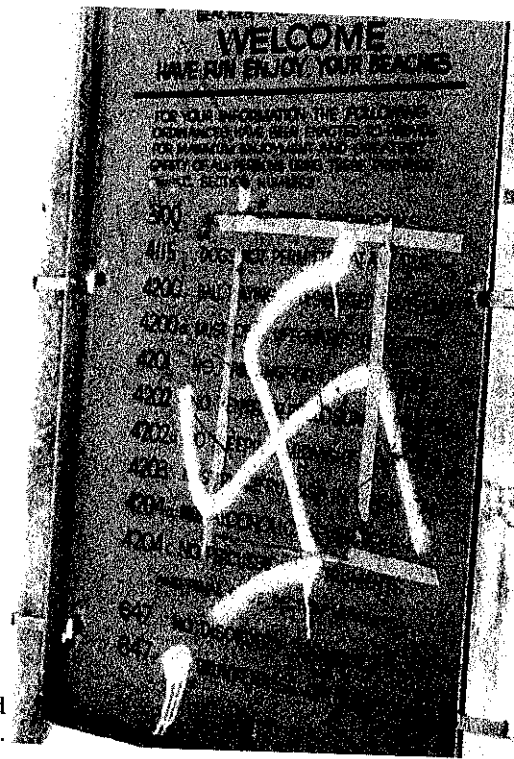
ask a stranger for a match or the time, and they will toss back frisbees or balls that have gone astray. Interaction beyond these sorts of fleeting and impersonal exchanges is confined to small children, teenagers, surfers, volleyball players, and men who try to pick up women. All of these may at one time or another engage strangers in conversation or in play. The overwhelming majority of beachgoers—whether alone, in couples, or in larger groupings—almost always keep strictly to themselves. As much as anything else, this sense of isolation typifies Southland Beach.

Beachgoers begin to leave in some numbers about 2 P.M., and on an average day the majority have left by 3 P.M. But if the day is warm and the late afternoon fog does not roll in, quite a few people will stay until sunset, when the last lifeguard tower is closed for the day. Indeed, some people, particularly inner-city people, regularly arrive at the beach around 3 P.M. A handful of couples and families may stay on after sunset, sometimes barbecuing dinner in a nearby parking lot. Some surfers continue to look for good rides, a couple of older men with metal detectors comb the sand, and joggers appear for their after-work exercise. A few lovers seek romance and solitude.

By nightfall, even on the warmest of nights, almost no one remains. Neither fires nor camping are permitted and sleeping on the beach after dark is discouraged by the police. A couple may park their car and walk across the sand to look at the moon glistening off the water, to stroll briefly, or to smoke marijuana, and a lone man may sleep, or walk along on an unknown quest. But at night, it is unusual for people to be on the beach. Only on the pier, where restaurants and arcades remain open until 12 P.M. or so, are there more than a few people after nightfall. Whoever the beachgoer may be, an average day at the beach is fun. But it is not always fun; there *can* be trouble.

Trouble on Southland Beach

As one approaches the sand, many prominently located signs list the following ordinances: "*Municipal Code*: No fires or fireworks; no dogs permitted at any time; ball playing in



Beach ordinances and graffiti.

designated areas only; must obey lifeguards' directions; no dressing or undressing; no tents or enclosures permitted; no sleeping midnight to 5 A.M.; must place rubbish in trash can; no alcoholic beverages; no percussion instruments. *Penal Code:* No disorderly conduct; no drunkenness or intoxication." As beachgoers cross the sand they are also likely to see this sign, painted in the shape of a whale on the back of each lifeguard tower: "Sorry folks, no dogs, horses, fires, or alcohol." As we shall see, many beachgoers plead ignorance of these ordinances; others simply disregard them.

While Southland Beach is a place of great enjoyment for many people, it is not without its hazards. There are three common kinds of trouble at this beach. First, there is trouble related to the water; second, there is trouble among ordinary beachgoers themselves; third, there is trouble that results

from the activities of non-beachgoers who victimize persons on the sandy beach.

Water trouble is common, and it can be serious. Although sharks are present in these waters, at least at the present writing they have not consumed any swimmers along Southland Beach. Since the movie "Jaws," however, beachgoers often talk about sharks, rather nervously. Other fish such as barracuda do sometimes bite a swimmer, and both jellyfish and stingray are commonplace and inflict painful stings. In the summer of 1976 a seal bit a young woman swimmer and then tossed her in the air. Such attacks, fortunately, are rare. People also drown or come near to doing so. It is easy for a swimmer to overestimate his or her ability, and on days when the surf is high or riptides are present, the water can be extremely dangerous. People can also be in danger while body surfing if they misjudge a wave or are thrown into one another by the surf's force. They can be seriously injured if hit by a surfboard. And poor swimmers or non-swimmers can step into hidden holes and go in over their heads. People can also step on unseen glass, metal, or rocks in the shallow water, and older people or children who are wading in shallow water can be injured by an errant football or by the roughhouse play of young men.

Many beachgoers complain that the water is cold (even in the summer the daytime water temperatures are only in the upper sixties), or polluted (it is called "garbage surf" by some, but it is in fact safe for swimming, if not for all marine life). But the cold and the pollution are mere annoyances. Real water dangers are serious enough to call for the year-round presence of a sizable force of skilled and experienced lifeguards. In the course of a single day when the surf is high or riptides are particularly treacherous, these lifeguards may rescue scores of swimmers. In an average summer month—July 1975, for example—lifeguards on Southland Beach made 300 rescues, without any drownings. This is a remarkable record in view of the fact that an estimated 3,824,000 people went to the beach in that month, and that many of them almost certainly took foolish risks.

Trouble among beachgoers themselves is less well pub-

licized, but it is nevertheless noteworthy. Among the more minor beach annoyances the following are common: loud radios, sunburn, bee stings, stepping on glass, flip-tops, or other litter, children kicking sand in the face of someone who is lying down attempting to sleep or sunbathe, and dogs who bark or bite or defecate on the sand where someone may sit.

Some equally common occurrences can be more annoying. People sometimes place their towels or blankets too close to another party, a practice that causes most people discomfort. Men of all ages and descriptions stroll the beach, talking to and often trying to pick up women. In many cases, this attention is unwanted and decidedly unpleasant. Teenagers, especially, may shout to or at one another in loudly obscene fashion, frightening or appalling older people or families with their children. Others, teenagers and older people alike, drink beer or sometimes vodka, or smoke marijuana, and a few become intoxicated, sometimes irritating or frightening those around them. Some take other narcotics, especially Quaalude.⁵ A major source of annoyance is the common practice by young men (and sometimes young women as well) of playing catch with footballs or frisbees. People who are lying on the sand, sometimes even sleeping, can be struck by such a missile or trampled by someone who is running to make a difficult catch.

Any of these problems can be moderately troublesome, but there are others that can be of a still more serious and disturbing nature. For example, there are arguments on the beach that sometimes lead to conflict. Some of these conflicts have an interethnic or interracial dimension. Fights, including brawls involving numbers of people, also occur. So does theft, with the result that someone who leaves his or her things to go for a swim or to buy refreshments may return to find that a radio, wallet, book, towel, or everything has been taken. Cars in parking lots are also broken into. Less common, but quite serious, are severe burns suffered by children who fall into the coals of a beach barbecue. For this reason, barbecues are prohibited, although some nevertheless appear on the beach and are lighted. Other beachgoers allow their children to dig deep holes in the sand. Sometimes such a hole

collapses, trapping and even suffocating a child before the sand can be dug away. Holes, like fires, are illegal, but they, too, continue to appear. People also lose their children with considerable regularity, and many hours of anguish may pass before the frightened child is located. For example, in July 1975, 200 children were reported lost, with 39 being lost on a single weekend day when an estimated 400,000 people crowded the beach.

Occasionally a child is sexually molested, usually while in the shallow water, a bathroom, or under the pier. And a regular feature of the beach landscape is provided by men who expose themselves. Known as "weinie wagggers," these men provide a continuing source of amusement to some, and affront to others. Some expose themselves discreetly, but a few are astonishingly bold, walking about totally nude, or masturbating openly. The indecent exposure of men can offend beachgoers, and such activities sometimes lead to arrest. We are not aware that very many beachgoers have had their days ruined by the sight of lovely young women in skimpy bikinis, the tops of which sometimes briefly go astray. But some people do complain about the sight of grossly fat people in bathing suits, and others, especially mothers who have brought their children to the beach, are seriously offended by the heated necking of a nearby couple or two gay men.

Other problems are created by people who do not come to the beach to enjoy its sun or its water or its relaxing ambience, but come instead to victimize beachgoers. Whether by design or by chance, these fully clothed visitors to the beach often create serious problems. Some of the theft, especially strong-arm theft and breaking into parked cars, is done by non-beachgoers. Some men who expose themselves are outsiders as well, although many are regular beachgoers who just happen to expose themselves from time to time. Other men come to the beach to molest children, or to make a homosexual contact, or to make sexual advances to women. Rape occurs at night, and in recent years at least, at least one rape-murder has taken place in broad daylight on the sand. Several rapes have occurred in bathrooms during the day. Other people come to the beach to steal or buy drugs.

In addition to the theft and sexual crimes of outsiders, there are crimes of violence, including murder. Authorities all too commonly find bodies in the morning. Sometimes these are suicides, sometimes they are victims of a drug overdose, and sometimes, as in the case of a seriously wounded man found stuffed into a trash can, they are the victims of an unknown assailant. Some of the most serious threats of violence have involved teenagers who have come to the beach in search of gang combat, or to terrorize beachgoers, or sometimes to attack "fags." In an effort to minimize gang violence, the pier has sometimes been closed by the police on various holidays, including Memorial Day and July Fourth. For example, on July 4, 1976, a riot involving teenage gangs caused the police to make eight arrests and to close the pier for 90 minutes. Later that evening, the police reported two knifings and one shooting on the pier.

A less traumatic but nevertheless common and troublesome aspect of the beach is the large number of strange or frightening persons it attracts. Transient men, still drunk from the night before, may attempt to panhandle along the waterline. Persons who are high on drugs may wander the beach behaving in bizarre or intimidating ways. Apparent psychotics may shout or disrobe or collapse in a heap; others have seizures, and derelicts of the most pathetic appearance may appear when least expected or wanted, sometimes flopping down on the sand near ordinary beachgoers. Others pick through garbage cans in a fashion sure to upset all but the most insensitive. A mentally retarded youth may stare too openly at a woman, leading her to move away in discomfort, or a strangely robed religionist may loudly exhort everyone to abandon all pleasures of the flesh, then tear off his clothes and run for the water.

All of these things can happen at Southland Beach. Yet apparently they do not happen often enough, or are not taken seriously enough, to spoil the pleasure of the millions of persons who go to this beach every year. The potential for trouble clearly exists, and trouble does occur, but apparently it does not get out of hand.



The Lifeguards

The popular vision of a Southern California lifeguard, confirmed by so many novels and movies, is that of a tall, blond, deeply tanned, athletic young man watching carefully over the safety of swimmers while beautifully bronzed young women in their bikinis loll expectantly in the background. The vision is not entirely fiction. Many lifeguards are tall and blond. All swim superbly. All take water safety seriously. Their towers are ringed by beautiful young women, and romance can blossom. Even before World War II, this image was popularized by two Southern California beach lifeguards, Buster Crabbe and Johnny Weismuller.

As one might expect, however, the Hollywood stereotype of a lifeguard is not always accurate. Many lifeguards are not blond; indeed, some have dark hair and a few are balding. In fact, on Southland Beach, one lifeguard is Asian, another is Jewish, one (who is particularly respected by his peers) has a Spanish surname, and one—more wondrous still—is a woman. Not all are pursued by admiring beach beauties; the tastes of such women for heroic men are said by lifeguards to have changed toward hairier and hipper types. Many lifeguards in turn pay only passing attention to bikiniied women on the beach. Some lifeguards are "beach people"